

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 L-03 NSC-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 SAJ-01 EB-07

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P R 081941Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8614

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 06968

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH CANTONAL ELECTIONS -- FIRST ROUND

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REF: PARIS 5779

SUMMARY. FIRST ROUND OF LOCAL CANTONAL ELECTIONS (TO DECIDE COMPOSITION OF HALF OF FRANCE'S 99 DEPARTMENTAL COUNCILS) WAS HELD MARCH 7. THE ONLY MAJOR SURPRISE WAS HEAVY PARTICIPATION (65.4 PERCENT OF VOTERS, COMPARED TO 54 PERCENT IN 1973 AND 61.8 PERCENT IN 1970, WHEN THE PRESENT INCUMBENTS WERE ELECTED). MOST NOTEWORTHY RESULTS WERE STRONG SHOWINGS BY THE SOCIALIST PARTY (PS) AND TO A LESSER EXTENT BY THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS (GISCARDIANS). OTHER PARTIES ARE ALSO READING POSITIVE SIGNS IN THE RESULTS: CENTER SHOWED SOME GAINS, PC FEELS IT HAS CONSOLIDATED ITS POSITION IN A STRENGTHENED UNITED LEFT AND ALMOST ALL UDR NATIONAL FIGURES WON OR ARE LEADING. THE RUN-OFFS IN THOSE CANTONS WHERE NO CANDIDATE WON A MAJORITY WILL BE HELD MARCH 14. END SUMMARY.

1. REFTEL POINTED OUT THE REASONS WHY MID-POINT ANALYSES ARE DANGEROUS. ONLY HALF THE CANTONS (NOT INCLUDING PARIS) ARE AT STAKE, LOCAL LABELS AND NON-AFFILIATED CANDIDATES MAKE FOR A CONFUSING PATCHWORK OF PARTY LOYALTIES, SOME OF THE PARTIES THEMSELVES WERE DIFFERENT IN 1970, MAKING COMPARISONS DIFFICULT, VOTERS ARE MAINLY INFLUENCED BY LOCAL ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES MORE IMPORTANT IN CANTONAL THAN IN OTHER ELECTIONS. NONE OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS, HOWEVER, HAS INHIBITED POLITICIANS AND THE PRESS FROM TRYING TO DRAW AS MANY LESSONS AS POSSIBLE FROM THE RESULTS. THIS REACTION IS A NATURAL RESULT OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES' SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS TO POLITICIZE THE ELECTIONS, CAPITALIZE ON THE LEFT'S MOMENTUM IN RECENT POLLS AND EXTRACT THEREFROM NATIONAL TRENDS. THE MAJORITY PARTIES, WHICH STARTED LATE IN THE CAMPAIGN TO DEFEND THEMSELVES, HAVE JOINED IN THE FLURRY OF INSTANT ANALYSIS, EVEN THOUGH MAJORITY LEADERS (PM CHIRAC, MINISTER OF INTERIOR PONIATOWSKI) HAD CALLED THE ELECTIONS "NON-POLITICAL".

2. (A) IN TERMS OF RAW VOTES, THE LEFT (INCLUDING THE EXTREME LEFT NON-SIGNATORIES OF THE COMMON PROGRAM) LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LOOKED LIKE THE CERTAIN WINNER WITH 56.53 PERCENT, AND THE SOCIALISTS REAFFIRMED AS THE DOMINANT FACTOR WITHIN THE LEFT. THE BREAKDOWN IN PERCENTAGES FOLLOWS: PS (26.5), PC (22.8), RADICAL LEFT (2.4), OTHER LEFT (4.8). PERCENTAGES FOR THE MAJORITY WERE UDR (10.6), CENTER (10), MODERATES (8.9), IR (8.5), OTHERS (5.5). (B) IN TERMS OF THE NUMBER OF SEATS ALREADY WON IN THE FIRST ROUND (889 OUT OF 1871), THE MAJORITY IS WELL AH-

EAD. APPROXIMATELY 516 ARE CLAIMED BY THE MAJORITY
PARTIES, 327 BY THE OPPOSITION AND 46 INDEPENDENT.
WITHIN THE MAJORITY, THE IR WON 135 SEATS (COMPARED TO
71 IN 1970), THE UDR 104, THE CENTER 157 AND OTHER 120.
WITHIN THE LEFT, THE PS WON 157 (COMPARED TO 131 IN 1970)
THE PC 76, MRG 44 AND OTHER 50.

(C) THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN THE PARTIES' SHARE OF VOTES
AND SEATS WON IS ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE DIFFERING SIZE AND
POPULATIONS OF THE CANTONS. THIS UNBALANCED REPRESENTA-
TION HAS ONCE AGAIN WORKED AGAINST THE LEFT, WHICH IS
TRADITIONALLY STRONGER IN THE LARGE CITIES THAN IN
RURAL AREAS. HOWEVER, THE COMPARISON MAY BE LESS UNBAL-
ANCED AFTER THE SECOND ROUND, SINCE THE LEFT IS AHEAD IN
MORE UNDECIDED CANTONS THAN THE MAJORITY. A NOTE OF

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 L-03 NSC-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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CAUTION SHOULD BE SOUNDED REGARDING THE ABOVE FIGURES:
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THE NON-AFFILIATED "OTHER" VOTES AND SEATS CANNOT BE AS EASILY ASSIGNED TO THE MAJORITY OR OPPOSITION AS IS DONE ABOVE AND IN THE PRESS. THEY CAN CHANGE SIDES, REMAIN INDEPENDENT OR ABSTAIN, THUS SUBSTANTIALLY CHANGING ANY GENERAL INDICATION.

3. AS POINTED OUT ABOVE, THE LOCAL NATURE OF THESE ELECTIONS, ESPECIALLY ON THE FIRST ROUND, WARN AGAINST DRAWING TOO MANY CONCLUSIONS AT THIS POINT. NEVERTHELESS, AN EXAMINATION OF CERTAIN AREAS HAS GIVEN SOME OBSERVERS THE IMPRESSION THAT THE PS HAS MADE CERTAIN GAINS AGAINST THE PC AS WELL AS THE MAJORITY AND THAT THE IR AND CENTER MADE GAINS AT THE UDR'S EXPENSE. THE PS AND THE IR WERE EXPECTED TO MOVE AHEAD, STARTING AS THEY WERE FROM A LOW BASE OF 1970 AND FIELDING MANY MORE CANDIDATES THAN THEY DID IN 1970 -- AND THEY SEEM TO BE LIVING UP TO THIS PREDICTION. THE UDR WAS EXPECTED TO LOSE -- PERHAPS MORE THAN IT HAS SO FAR -- REFLECTING A TREND SINCE THE CHABAN-DELMAS DEBACLE IN 1974. THE PC, ON THE OTHER HAND, MUST BE DISAPPOINTED THAT IT IS BEING OUTDISTANCED BY THE PS- INSTEAD OF REAPING MORE BENEFITS FROM THE NEW IMAGE IT HAS BEEN TRYING TO PROJECT SINCE ITS XXII CONGRESS LAST MONTH.

4. WHAT WILL BE INTERESTING TO WATCH DURING THE PREPARATION FOR THE SECOND ROUND, AND WHAT MAY HAVE MORE NATIONAL MEANING, IS HOW THE MAJORITY AND ESPECIALLY THE OPPOSITION MANEUVER WITHIN THEIR ALLIANCES -- AND HOW VOTERS REACT TO THESE TACTICS. THE REFUSAL BY THE PS TO AGREE WITH THE PC ON SINGLE CANDIDATES IN THE FIRST ROUND HAS LEFT SOME BITTERNESS IN PC CIRCLES; AT THE SAME TIME, SOCIALIST VOTERS CANNOT ALWAYS

BE COUNTED ON TO RALLY TO THE PC CANDIDATE IN THE RUN-OFFS. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM EXIST SUSPICIONS BETWEEN THE UDR AND THE IR, WHOSE VOTERS COULD ALSO CHANGE COLORS IN THE FACE OF AN ATTRACTIVE OPPOSITION CANDIDATE. ADDED TO THESE UNKNOWN IS THE FACT THAT 18 YEAR-OLDS ARE VOTING FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE AGE LIMIT WAS REDUCED LAST YEAR. FINALLY, THE CAMPAIGNING IS NOT OVER. IT HAS BEEN HEATING UP FOR THE LAST TWO WEEKS AND MAY CONTINUE IN THE HOME STRETCH, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REACHING THE POTENTIAL VOTERS WHO ABSTAINED IN THE FIRST ROUND. IN THE MEANTIME, THE FRENCH SEEM TO HAVE TAKEN PRIDE IN THE FACT THAT THE CANTONALS HAVE ATTRACTED A HIGH LEVEL OF ATTENTION WITH THE PUBLIC, SATISFIED THAT THE POLITICAL DEBATE HAS BEEN RELATIVELY ELEVATED AND RELIEVED THAT THIS GENERAL IMAGE WAS NOT MARRED BY-AGRICULTURAL DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE SOUTH.
RUSH

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